

Herbert T. Tiffany Chinese Painting Collection

V1

Finding aid prepared by Jenette Parish

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Enoch Pratt Free Library Special Collections

January, 2010

<http://www.prattlibrary.org/>

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Table of Contents

<u>Summary Information</u>	3
<u>Biographical/Historical note</u>	4
<u>Scope and Contents</u>	4
<u>Arrangement note</u>	4
<u>Administrative Information</u>	5
<u>Controlled Access Headings</u>	5
<u>Collection Inventory</u>	7

Summary Information

Repository	Enoch Pratt Free Library Special Collections
Title	Herbert T. Tiffany Chinese Painting Collection
Date	1735-1795
Extent	1.5 Linear feet 6 boxes, 24 books and one original book casing
Language	Chinese
Graphic materials [Box]	1-6
Container	1-24

Biographical/Historical note

None

Scope and Contents

The Herbert T. Tiffany Collection consists of an original set of 24 books, which date from the Ch'ien Lung period, Qing Dynasty (1735-1795). Professor Chao Ming Chen of Johns Hopkins University determined that the paintings were done in European colors from mineral pigments, which were not available in China until this period. Prior to this period, only vegetable colors were used in paintings. The paintings are primarily executed on rice paper with the exception of the one book that has paintings on Pei leaves. Mr. Chen stated: "the collection is one of the finest he has seen in the U.S. They are paintings that a Chinese emperor may have once treasured." He asserted that two of the books-containing portraits of the emperor and personages of the court, could have been the original possessions only of the emperor or some high official. In addition, he said that he had never seen the equal of these three books anywhere in the U.S. except the congressional library.

The books are made of bamboo paper, and the rice paper illustrations are affixed to them by pasted strips of light blue or dark blue silk, which form the frames for the paintings in most of the books. The books are bound in brocade. The Pei leaves are approximately 4" x 3" and are so aged that only the skeleton and finest tissue of them are left. Mr. Chen explained that the Pei leaf paintings were probably done in a Chinese monastery, as it was the peculiar art of the monks to paint on the sacred leaves. Usually, however, religious subjects were treated.

The royalty paintings turn from left to right and embrace court life; one first encounters the Son of the Sun in his robes of imperial yellow with the dragon on his robe facing to the right. Only the emperor could wear designs of the dragon facing right, as pointed out by Mr. Chen. In this portrait the highborn one is enthroned and arrayed for a formal ceremony. Included in the paintings are the following: His highness in informal poses (drinking tea, reading a book, smoking a pipe, in military attire) and the empress dressing in her boudoir, holding a golden gift in her hand or fanning herself. In garden scenes the highnesses are seated on drum-shaped porcelains.

Arrangement note

The collection is housed in 6 boxes, which contains 24 books. The 12 books preserved in boxes 2 and 3 were originally housed in the large silk-lined box preserved in box 1. Items were separated from the original large silk box casing because of its fragility. The 12 books do not appear to have an original order and were grouped together by titles.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

Enoch Pratt Free Library Special Collections January, 2010

Revision Description

Entered into Archivist Toolkit by Joan M. Wolk February, 2016

Conditions Governing Access

Unrestricted, open by appointment.

Acquisition

In 1935, Herbert T. Tiffany of the Severn Apartments donated a Chinese Painting collection to the Enoch Pratt Free Library. The paintings were in his family for 100 years, and were acquired by his grandfather, Israel Thorndike, of Boston, who had engaged in trade with India and China.

Controlled Access Headings

Genre(s)

- China painting
- Portraits

Occupation(s)

- emperors
- Monks

Personal Name(s)

- Ch' en, Chao Ming
- Thorndike, Israel
- Tiffany, Herbert T., 1861-1944

Subject(s)

- Bamboo paper
- Chinese Monastery
- Ch'ien Lung
- Court personages
- Johns Hopkins University
- mineral pigment
- Pei leaves
- Qing Dynasty (1735-1795)
- rice paper (paper)
- Sacred leaves
- Son of the Sun
- Vegetable colors

Collection Inventory

	Box	Box-folder
Original silk-lined box for 12 small books (17" x 11"). The books are now preserved in Box 2 and 3 to preserve the integrity of the original casing.	1	Silk box
	Box	Volume
Children's Amusements - A (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	2	1
Children's Amusements - B (10) 7.5" x 5.5"	2	2
Punishments of China (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	2	3
Punishments of China (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	2	4
Chinese Junks and Passage Boats (11) 7.5" x 5.5"	2	5
Female Complements (sp?) (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	2	6
Fruits of China-A (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	3	7
Fruits of China-B (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	3	8
Fruits of China-C (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	3	9
Chinese House Ornaments (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	3	10

Beggars and Peddlers Ve (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	3	11
Tea Pigeon (12) 7.5" x 5.5"	3	12
Untitled (16) on Pei leaves. Women w/instruments and birds (song?). Approximately 4" x 3"	4	13
Chinese Junk and Passage Boats (10) 9.5"x 7	4	14
Insects and Flowers - A (12) 11.5" x 7.5"	4	15
Insects and Flowers - B (12) 11.5" x 7.5"	4	16
Fruits of China (12) 9.5" x 7"	5	17
Tea Pigeon (12) 9.5" x 7"	5	18
Female Complyment (10) 9.5" x 7"	5	19
Chinese House Ornaments (14) 9.5" x 7"	5	20
Untitled-Chinese Field Birds (12) 12.5" x 8.5"	6	21
Chinese Landscapes (12) 11" x 7"	6	22
Untitled-Portraits of Royalty-Emperor and Empress (12) 12" x 8"	6	23

Untitled-Male and female portraits-Lg. (10) 10.5" x 7.5", Med. (5) 8.5" x 4.5", and Sm. (3) 2.5" x 3.5"

6

24